



State Of Montana

Commissioner of Political Practices Biennial Report

STATE OF MONTANA

FOR FY2012

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Commissioner of Political Practices is a small, independent regulatory agency responsible for the collection of campaign finance and lobbyist financial disclosure information. The agency is also responsible for resolution of related formal complaints as well as enforcement of the Montana Code of Ethics and certain required information disclosures for state officials and state employees.

SECTION 1: AGENCY IT PLAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS – GOALS & OBJECTIVES

1.1 Goals

Goal Number 1: ITG 1

Complete our on-line campaign and lobby reporting systems

Description: Work that was contracted in June, 2003 has yet to be completed. We are working to see that the contractor completes that work so that we can start the next phase, which involves making the systems attractive to users and well-suited to reducing manual processes.

Benefits: Citizens will benefit by having improved disclosure of state and local political activity. Taxpayers will benefit from the savings resulting from modern business processes, replacing outdated manual processes. CPP staff will benefit from time freed up to spend on work that's more rewarding and productive in meeting our overall mission.

Which state strategic goal or objective does your goal address? Objective 2-5, expansion of eGovernment services.

Supporting Objective/Action ITO 1-1

Complete the political committee reporting service as soon as possible.

Describe the business requirements or business problem driving this objective: Political committees are required to report frequently. At times there can be a great deal of data to report. Existing systems are paper-bound and the on-line service developed to meet this need is not ready. Deadlines in 2006, 2008 and now 2010 were not met.

Describe the benefits to be derived from the successful completion of this objective: Voluminous reports that come in on paper now and must be manually data entered and checked for, among other things, math errors, will be reported using a digital on-line service with some basic error checks.

Describe the anticipated risks associated with this objective: We are spending a huge amount of time and effort. Results come slowly and there's always danger that the project could stall and be difficult or impossible to restart. More likely risk is spending a lot of time for marginal results. And while it isn't costing us much in contractor payments, relatively speaking, we can only assume that someone is paying the bill for this extremely drawn-out process.

Describe how this objective supports the agency IT goal: It's an integral piece.

What is the timeframe for completion of this objective: As soon as possible; we are currently testing and retesting; we continue to find bugs.

Describe the critical success factors associated with this objective; i.e., how will you know when it has been successfully completed? We'll know this initial phase is completed when we see more than a few groups using it and see that the reported data is making it to the database accurately.

Status: As of January 2012 all of our online services were successfully launched. Because the agency was moving towards a mandate for electronic filing, Montana Interactive suggested that they research and compose a risk assessment on all online filing services. The agency felt that this was a good idea so we could address any issues prior to a mandate. February 28, 2012 a risk assessment was drafted and circulated among CPP staff. Commissioner Murry was appalled at the results of the risk assessment and the agency refused to sign the risk assessment as it was. The agency took immediate action. March 2, 2012 a meeting was held to discuss options. The risk assessment indicated that all of the CPP services shared a server with Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Department of Revenue, and the Secretary of State. The risk of system failure due to heavy traffic on the server is extremely high. A system overload could result in costly hardware repairs, loss of data, and public embarrassment. CPP has taken steps to avoid these issues from surfacing but the workarounds are not a good permanent solution. The lobbying services are on the same server and attached to the same database as the campaign reporting services. Since CPP is looking to rewrite the database and online services the enhancements and ease of use issues will also be addressed in the re-write.

CPP worked with ITSD and Dave Carlson provided an analysis of the services, concerns and possible solutions. The issues/concerns that ITSD noted are as follows:

- The database reports are not date driven which is inconsistent with the online functionality.
- 15 complex online services within the MI web application
- Budget constraints of original database conversion from Access to Oracle led to an inadequately architected database
- MI web application is very complex and fragile as a result of workarounds created to accommodate the outdated database.
- The internal application lacks necessary functionality. The database is a simple reports and forms application and wasn't designed to accommodate complex online services.
- Two separate applications (MI Web Application, StoneRiver Internal Application) maintained by two different vendors are connected to the same database.
- Frequent change of vision as a result of frequent changes in leadership
- Small non-technical staff

Based on the analysis completed by ITSD they offered some possible solutions. First possibility would be a database rebuild. However this option would create some significant problems for the online applications. There are also some concerns about the high possibility that some of the work around protocols would be lost in the process of the transition. ITSD advised that anytime there are three different applications and multiple vendors these problems are going to occur. A database rebuild won't solve the problem. Second, ITSD recommended a rewrite of the entire system using the lobbyist application as a prototype and Stoneriver as single vendor. This option would also alleviate the communication and fragile nature of these services since one single vendor has access and control of all of the moving parts of the applications.

With the help of ITSD, CPP is moving forward with a HB 10 request for funding to do a complete rewrite of the database and online application.

Goal Number 2: ITG 2

Upgrade services to achieve ease-of-use and an attractiveness that lends itself to making these systems mandatory for politicians and lobbyists.

Description: These systems will not achieve a positive benefit to cost ratio until they're used by the majority of candidates and committees. Experience across the country shows that won't happen until use is made mandatory. Realizing that the users (candidates) must support that notion through a legislative vote, it's essential that the systems be attractive and easy to use.

Describe the business requirements or business problem driving this objective: Ease of use was not achieved in the initial roll-out of these systems.

Describe the benefits to be derived from the successful completion of this objective: Ease of use is assumed to result in increased use. To the extent use can be increased, manual data entry can be reduced. Further, public access is enhanced, as on-line reporting will make the information more readily available to the public.

Describe the anticipated risks associated with this objective: None we're aware of.

Describe how this objective supports the agency IT goal: This is central to our goal of making these systems mandatory for most users.

What is the timeframe for completion of this objective: Time-frames are perceived to be out of our control and indeterminate, given the lack of fiscal and other support.

Describe the critical success factors associated with this objective; i.e., how will you know when it has been successfully completed? When we achieve passage of legislation making these systems mandatory for most users we will have completed the effort. Near-term, intermediate success factors involve documentation and scheduling agreements on needed enhancements.

Status: In March 2012 COPP adopted an administrative rule mandating statewide campaigns to use Campaign Tracker for their finance reporting. To accommodate the risk of losing data or a system failure we implemented a work around on filing days. The Search and Download service comes down the night before a filing deadline and is brought back up at 6:00pm on the filing day. This reduces the risk by not allowing the public from pulling data from the same server that the campaigns are sending reports to.

There have been little enhancements made to the existing services. The IT budget has gone to changes/fixes made to both the database and on-line services to meet basic functionality needs. COPP has been and will continue to collect ideas, needs, and public complaints to improve the services as they are being re-built.

Benefits: What benefits are realized and who realizes the benefits? Citizens will benefit by having improved disclosure of state and local political activity – on-line access to disclosure reports, rather than having to visit our office in Helena to request paper copies. Taxpayers will benefit from the savings resulting from modern business processes, replacing outdated manual data entry processes. CPP staff will benefit from time freed up to spend on work that's more rewarding and productive in meeting our overall mission.

Which state strategic goal(s) and/or objective(s) does your goal address? Objective 2-5, expansion of eGovernment services.

2.1 IT Initiatives *(Taken from 2010 plan and 2011 update)*

Initiative 1 - Title: Lobbyist registration and reporting enhancements

Description: Take care of those items identified as “needs” that couldn’t be accomplished in the initial development of these services due to lack of time and budget and aren’t eligible for no-cost warranty or enhancement work.

Status: Due to lack of time and budget these enhancements were not completed. However, the Lobbying and Principal Service has been functional since 2009 and is working well. None of the “needs” are critical except for the addition of the ability to file financial reports in the case of a special session. This issue specifically will be addressed during the database and online service re-build.

3 No additional information provided.

More information is available on request.